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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002446

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL KS KN  
SUBJECT: ROK EXPERT ON NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEFLECTIONS

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Professor Yoon Yeosang, President of NKDB (Database Center for North Korean Human Rights), in a December 9 meeting with Poloff, said DPRK authorities seemed recently to be adhering to two points of the North Korean criminal code they had previously ignored: limiting detention periods to no more than two months and refraining from detaining pregnant women. Professor Yoon attributed these changes to international human rights allegations and pressure. Professor Yoon also said defectors, since the year 2000, had exhibited many of the characteristics of a "normal" immigrant mentality, and compared their reasons for defecting to those of South Koreans who immigrate to the U.S. END SUMMARY.

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Tracking North Korean Human Rights Abuses  
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¶12. (C) The principal mission of Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) is to gather evidence of and document North Korean human rights violations. NKDB uses defector interviews conducted in both South Korea and third countries as its primary source of information. These are supplemented and cross-referenced with testimonies in publicly available reports, books, and films. The organization manages a database that currently logs approximately 8,000 human rights violations and publishes white papers on its findings. NKDB also uses its small staff of three psychologists to offer counseling to North Korean defectors.

¶13. (C) Professor Yoon said that 70 percent of North Korean defectors in his database reported being from the provinces of Hamgyong Namdo and Hamgyong Bukto. However, because many had actually been expelled from urban centers like Pyongyang to the Hamgyong countryside, the database recorded larger numbers of human rights violations in these cities. As there were very few defectors from Hwanghae-do and Kangwon-do, Yoon had little information on these regions; nevertheless, he did not believe the incidence of human rights violations varied significantly by locale.

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Latest North Korean Human Rights Violations White Paper  
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¶14. (C) Presenting Poloff with the English translation of the Center's 2009 White Paper on North Korean Human Rights, released in October, Professor Yoon said DPRK authorities seemed recently to be adhering to two points of the North

Korean criminal code they had previously ignored. As prescribed by the law, security forces appeared to be limiting detention periods to no more than two months. They also seemed to be refraining from detaining pregnant women -- also in accordance with the law -- a development Yoon attributed to international pressure on human rights.

¶15. (C) Punishment for crimes related to possession or distribution of foreign media and outside information, or the leaking of internal North Korean information, seemed to be increasing in severity. Contacts with religious groups or ideas were punished harshly, followed next in severity by meeting with foreigners and telling them information about North Korea that the regime considered "secret." Yoon said any contact with South Koreans or ethnic Korean Chinese was also a crime in North Korea. Listening to foreign radio and watching DVDs and videos was punished as well, but less severely. (Note: In 2005, Professor Yoon conducted a study commissioned by the Korea Press Foundation on defectors, exposure to foreign media, particularly radio. He said it is available in hard copy in the ROK National Assembly library. End Note.)

¶16. (C) Yoon said those punished in North Korea were sent to political camps, hard labor camps, or regular prisons, depending on the crime. Political criminals were overseen by the government's security services and were further divided depending on whether the nature of their crime was "internal" or "external." Internal political crimes encompassed efforts to overturn the regime, attempts to hurt or criticize Kim Jong Il or Kim Il Sung, and criticism of juche ideology. External crimes included contact with foreign people, ideas and thinking, ideology, or media. Yoon did not specify the

differences in punishment for these two types of political crimes, but he noted that the type of crime determined the type of camp at which offenders were incarcerated.

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Trends in North Korean Defection  
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¶17. (C) The ages, gender, methods, and motivations of North Korean defectors had changed significantly over the years, Yoon explained. Defectors before the 1990s tended to be military men in their 20s and 30s who walked across the DMZ. From 1991-1994 defectors continued to be primarily young men, but were mainly students, diplomats, and laborers such as loggers sent to Russia and Eastern Europe; these had been prompted to defect by the Soviet collapse. Consequently, North Korea recalled many of its citizens from former Soviet countries. After 1994, nearly ninety percent of defectors left for economic reasons related to the famine; they exhibited a greater age diversity and there were more females than in earlier periods.

¶18. (C) After 2000, familial group defection became more common; furthermore, females came to constitute a majority of defectors for the first time. Most tended to be from the Hamgyong provinces, the largest demographic group was between 20 and 30 years of age, and their reasons for leaving North Korea were more diverse. During this period defectors exhibited many of the characteristics of a "normal" immigrant mentality, Yoon said, their motivations akin to those of South Koreans who immigrated to the U.S. These defectors generally sought reunion with family members who had already defected, economic opportunities, educational opportunities for their children, and a chance at a more stable life.

¶19. (C) Additionally, after the year 2000, more defectors made the decision to defect to South Korea while still in North Korea, mainly due to contact many had with North Koreans who had already defected to the South. In the 1990s, most North Korean defectors had first become aware of the option of defecting to South Korea after they crossed the border into China. Since 2000, there has also been greater variation in time between escape from North Korea and arrival in South Korea, ranging from -- in rare cases -- one day, to as long

as ten years, with 20-30 percent falling in the six-month range.

¶10. (C) Some defectors have expressed interest in residing in places other than South Korea. Yoon said the second most desirable location was China, because from there it was easier to go back and forth to North Korea to see family members. The third most preferred country was the U.S., followed by a rather small number who mentioned Japan or European countries.

¶11. (C) Yoon assessed that the number of North Korean defectors resettled in the U.S. was relatively small because of technical difficulties for gaining U.S. resettlement. Also, though preference for resettlement in Europe was fairly low upon defection, the number of defectors resettling in the United Kingdom was increasing as more in South Korea opt to resettle a second time in the UK. Professor Yoon Qd some defectors whose first choice would have been the U.S. ended up in South Korea because they knew of the difficulties associated with the U.S. option.

STEPHENS